

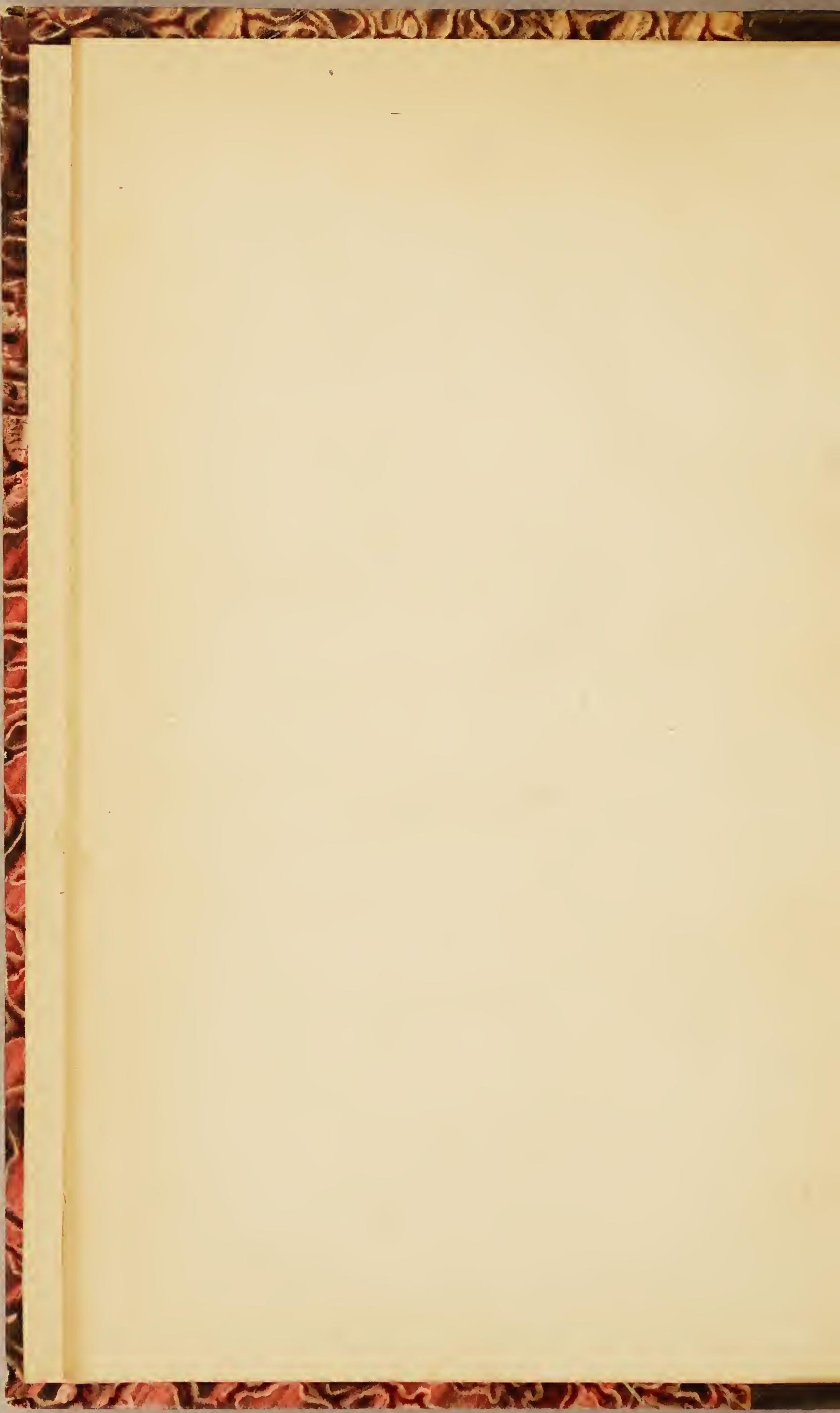


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John Carter Brown.



Recd No 5.

R E M A R K S

ON A

P A S S A G E

FROM

The River BALISE, in the BAY of
HONDURAS, to MERIDA;

T H E

Capital of the Province of JUCATAN,
In the Spanish West Indies.

By Lieutenant C O O K,
Ordered by Sir WILLIAM BURNABY,

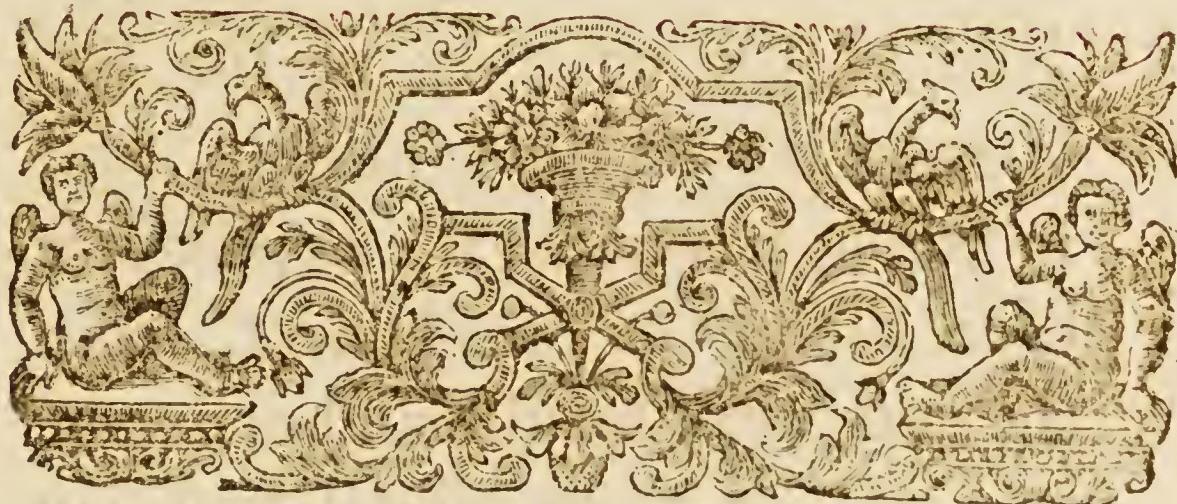
Rear Admiral of the Red, in Jamaica ;
With Dispatches to the Governor of the Province ;

Relative to the
Logwood Cutters in the Bay of HONDURAS,
In February and March 1765.

L O N D O N :

Printed for C. PARKER, the Upper Part of New Bond
Street. M DCCLXIX.





R E M A R K S, &c.

HE first part of this passage from the road of Ba-leise to Baccalar, is entirely by water; first coast-ways to the entrance of the Rio Hondo, from thence through an arm of that river, that leads to three small Lagoons, till you arrive at the

B lake

lake of Baccalar, on whose banks the town and castle of St. Philips is situated. The distance from Balise to the entrance of the Rio Hondo, is near thirty leagues, and in sailing has much the appearance of a straight or broad river, from the number of small island or quays, (as they are there called) that lay at about five or six leagues distance from the main, and parallel with it; both the islands and main are very flat, the former of which are for the most part covered with the Mangrove and palmeta trees ; 'tis rare to see a beach, on either the main or the quays, for the Mangrove ; the course up is about the N.N.W. and in general very shoaly, so much so at many places, that the *Flatts* which (the baymen use to carry their logwood) of about four or five feet draught

draught of water often ground, and in some particular places, raise the mud for a mile together. In short, the navigation on this part of the coast, from Baleise to the Rio Hondo, is as much a pilot's water for those boats, as the Thames is for ships from London to the Nore; the quays abound with Goannas, of which we shot several, going ashore for that purpose, and many Allegators lurk in the shoal water under the Mangrove bushes; we were accompanied by a master of a merchant ship (a lieutenant in the navy) in his long boat, partly out of compliment, and partly out of curiosity, to see the country and Baccalar; myself going into the Rio Hondo, with one Maud, one of the most considerable bay merchants, in one of his Flatts, which boats have a to-

lerable good cabbin, and are schooner rigg'd. The entrance of the Rio Hondo is narrow, not more than a hundred yards over, or a half cables length, and is very deep, as from its name Hondo, signifying the same in the Spanish. About a quarter of a mile from the river's mouth, and open to the sea, on the north shore, is a look out, which is generally kept by a sergeant's, but sometimes a corporal's guard, which is weekly relieved from the garrison at Baccalar, from which, thro' the woods, it is distant only about five Spanish leagues, and from hence notice is given of whatever comes into the river to the commandant; this is called the lower look out. I must not here omit observing, how much it is the interest of the baymen (and which indeed they never fail to avail them-

themselves of) to be on good terms with the guards of these outposts; this my friend the merchant did, by making the serjeant and his guard very drunk, that he not only told him where they had discovered a good spot of logwood, but am persuaded, had he discovered a mine as rich as Potosi, he would have made no scruple of informing him of it; the officer of these commands, which is generally a serjeant, is besides this scene of jollity, often complimented with a piece of strip'd cotton, or some such light stuff, to make him a shirt, waistcoat or trowsers, or perhaps a pair of European shoes for his wife. These little presents the commandant of Baccalar is not totally insensible of, and is often mean enough to be very jealous of, as it in a manner affects him, who is both

com-

commander and clothier ; this Mr. Maud told me was one of the principal reasons of the late disturbances in the bay ; the commandant of Baccalar being offended at this generosity of the English, hurting his priviledge so much, as to make him persuade the late governor of the province, that it had never been customary for the English to cut wood in the Rio Hondo, and in doing which they had gone beyond the limits of the treaty of Paris.

Tho' the baymen consider their right by that treaty, from Cape Ca-touch to Cape Honduras ; this was redressed by virtue of an order from the court of Spain, in favour of the cutters, in consequence of a remonstrance of our ministry in 1764, the duplicate of which order, together with

with Sir William's letter, I was en-
charged with.

In sailing from this to the next
look out, you open a fine Lagoon on
the south side of the river, about a
league and a half from the lower
look out; its called by the baymen
the four mile Lagoon, but by the
Spaniards the Zaho Mal; its of an
oval form, about half a league in its
shortest breadth, and pretty deep;
in this Lagoon our companion, the
master of the merchantman, lost his
long boat, oversetting in a squall,
in turning out of the Lagoon, to
get into the river, where we had,
to avoid the insects, musquetoes,&c.
anchored for the night; the river
here abouts is so narrow, as scarce
to

to afford room for the boom of the mainsail to gibe; they have a custom when they stop in the river on any occasion, to bush the Flatt, as they term it, which is no more than to luff round and drive her bowsprit and entangle it in the bush, which sides the Flatt, the stream being very weak.

The upper look out is from the river's mouth, about four Spanish leagues, and is situated at the entrance of a small creek (almost hid by the Mangroves) on the north shore of the river that opens to the passage to Baccalar; the course up the river to this place is about N. S. W. here also is a sergeant's guard; it was at this place the commandant

of

Baccalar came in his Parriagua, to carry me up, having advice from the lower look out of my arrival in the river. — Here, on my coming on shore, I was saluted with four patteraroes, brought seemingly on purpose, the guard in every respect like the lower look-out. — We were prevented the pleasure of returning this salute, by the loss of our long-boat, which the master had equipped with swivels for the purpose, as we were apprized of these compliments. This Creek is called the Cheequé, where, after the ceremony of signing vouchers for the commandants having admitted us into the river, &c. and a repast of chocolate, we all imbark'd on board

C his

his Parriagua for Baccalar. The passage now becomes very intricate, through a very narrow channel, and rapid stream, that often throws the boat into the bushes. At the extremity of this narrow rivulet is a corporal's guard, open to the first of the three beforementioned Lagoons; the passages between which are so very difficult, that none but a well acquainted person could navigate one of those kind of boats of five or six inches draught to Baccalar; but I observed that the general course was about N.N.E. and the distance six or seven leagues. We arrived at Baccalar after seven or eight hours passage, about ten at night, during which nothing material happen'd, unless our being disturb'd

disturb'd by an Allegator, which our boat in its passage had awaked, as it lay on the water : our boat was frequently trackt by hand, thro' many of the channels, being very narrow and shoally.

Baccalar is a small, poor, straggling village, of ill-built huts, of stakes of the Palmeta-tree drove in the ground, plastered with earth, and thatched with the leaves; in number not more than a hundred Spaniards and Indians, of the former they are most of the soldiers militia of the province. It has nothing to recommend it but its situation, which is extreamly pleasant; being on the summit of a rising ground; on the north side

the lake is bounded by a pleasing prospect of woods, at an agreeable distance on the opposite shore.

The fort or castle of St. Phillips is also situated on the summit of this little hill, not more than a hundred yards from the shore of the Lake, is in form of a square, with salient angles: it faces to the four Cardinal Points; has four pieces of ordnance on each side, about twelve pounders, and one from each angle to cover the ditch, which is dry, and palisadoed, but no out-work: they have swivels mounted on the Marlons; not being invited to see it, cannot be very particular in my description of it: It is garrisoned by a company

pany of foot, and some few militia of the town, but so very undisciplined, and ill cloathed, they have scarce the appearance of Falstaff's company of soldiers.

From hence a traveller must furnish himself with every necessary for a journey of three days, having a wilderness, as they call it, a wood of about thirty-four Spanish leagues to the first Indian town, call'd Chumhubut: it is also best to take your own liquor with you for the whole journey, as there is not any to be had in this country except Aquadent, which is very bad, scarce, and dear. As to the acquiring my necessaries, provisions, mules, indians, &c. I had

no trouble with that, the commandant with whom I lived, during my residence in this town of three days, took all that on himself, for which I had no other trouble but to pay him.

Being equipped with every necessary, as mules, indians, interpreters, and hammocks of that country, to be carried in case of wearying, or to sleep in the night, you enter the wood, whose path in general is from fifteen to twenty feet wide; often interrupted by the fall of large trees; through which, however, a path is generally burnt by the first traveller, to admit a horse to pass, and is in general as well screen'd from

from the sun (by the meeting branches over head) as the Mall in St. James's Park. Here you see at every four or five leagues distance, a shed like what our common smith's, or farriers use to shoe their horses in, and is what the natives call a Rings-house: Being built by order of the governor, for the convenience of travelling; as there is not, as in Europe, houses of entertainment, or lodging, they answer the purpose very well in this climate, where you have your own provisions, and sleeping convenience with you; as they shelter from the sun and rain, and are always built near the water, either a Lagoon or branch of one, or what may be left from the rains.

The

The woods consist chiefly of mahogany, cedar gopal, (of which they make a kind of gum elemy) the small and wild cotton, palmeta, and cocoa nuts, and many aloes, not much incommoded with under brush: it is the swampy ground that abounds with the logwood, which the Spaniards call Palo Tinto. In travelling thro' the swamps it is very troublesome, the mules being knee deep, in the dry season, in a stiff blueish mud, often times nearly sticking fast, and the boughs of the logwood trees so low, as to oblige you to lay flat on the mules shoulders, whilst the animal is all that time plunging in endeavouring to extricate himself from the mire. Of game there is the quarm and

and curasoe birds, nearly as big as turkeys, and very fine food. Of beasts, wild deer and the warree*, or musk hog. There are some wild beasts, as tygers, and some others, whose names I dont remember, but 'tis rare they are troublesome; travellers make no account of them. Parrots and Monkeys are also very numerous in the woods, as is common with those climates.

* The Warree is the Tajacu, or Musk Hog of Mexico; the Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences gives an account of this animal; it is very good food.

D After

After passing the wilderness, the journey becomes more pleasant, always dining and sleeping in an Indian town; and in rather better houses than the former, they being staked closer, and plastered with earth: these are also built by the governor's order, for the same purpose as those in the woods. Here a chief of the Indians always resides, being obliged so to do, to be ready to furnish travellers with every thing necessary they may want; prepare their victuals; get them fresh mules and Indians, who travel at the order of this chief, who is a kind of alderman in the village; you pay only for the mules, and that very cheap. This Pazi-que, or Chief, always assembles about

bout half a dozen of natives of the town, of both sexes. As soon as he discovers you coming into the town, by a particular shout, they prepare your victuals, wash your feet with warm water, and make every thing ready for your setting off again ; the diet is generally fowls, eggs, or young pork ; chocolate and maize bread, all very cheap.

From Chunhuhub to Merida is about fifty-seven Spanish leagues, and may be said to be entirely thro' the woods, tho' not so thick and lofty as the wilderness ; and frequently as you approach the capital, opens to plantations ; the path very serpentine, scarce ever

seeing two hundred yards before you ; the soil a reddish clay ; very rocky ; and the country low, level, and badly water'd, not crossing one river in a journey of ninety-one leagues from Baccalar to Merida.

There is in every town a publick well sunk with much difficulty, thro' a strata of hard rock, some of these are very deep ; the water is in general hard, tho' not unpalatable. The people are healthy, and, as they say, remarkable for their longevity. From the wood to Merida you pass fourteen Indian towns ; in every one of which is a kind of church, or place of worship ; tho' one priest often officiates for three of these villages ; riding from one to the other, having half

half way houses, or sheds, built for them by the poor Indians to secure them from rain; they appear to be superlatively ignorant, by what I could discover, thro' the inconvenience of an interpreter; of course can but ill impart with their small stock of knowledge to their flock, who they keep in the most obscure ignorance, and abject servility, shewing both by their adoration of such divines. They, however, behaved very polite and civil towards me, always waiting at the king's house to receive me; even when I have come in late at night, have invited me to come to sup with them, offer'd me lodgings in their houses, complimented me with their best mule

to

to proceed on my journey, and often a nosegay from the bosom of our virgin mother, not without hinting for a little present to the church ; and some English rum for their poor congregation.

Merida is a handsome well built town, in form a square ; the streets are spacious, parallel to each other, and cross at right angles, but have only the foot paths pav'd ; it is built on a sandy soil ; has a handsome arch'd gate way at the end of every street, next the country, but no gates hung : the houses are low built of stone, and white wash'd ; the outside of which, in this country, has bad effect on the eyes ; it contains, as I was told, about twenty-four

four churches, a good cathedral, a convent of nuns, and a monastry of fryars, of the order of St. Francis; two or three good squares; in the principal of which, and on the north side, resides the governor; and has the cathedral and bishop's palace on the east; the grand council house on the west; and houses of the principal inhabitants form the south side: there is but little appearance of commerce, or any mechanic art; very few public shops, but all appearing like people living on their own private fortune; and many are such; who live on the acquired wealth of their ancestors; while the indolence of many others prompts them to no industry or commerce; contented

to

to live on the small profits of a plantation, and that cultivated by the Indians: but there is a small trade coast-ways to Campeachy, from the port of Sifal (which is distant only twelve leagues) in bees wax, leather, gopal, ebony, and logwood; but this a stranger cannot immediately discover. The revenues of the province to the crown of Spain are very considerable, arising mostly from the article of cotton, with which the woods abound.

The citadel, or castle, stands on a level spot of ground (as the country is in general); as you enter the town, from the eastward, it is of no consequence, being origi-

originally built to protect the Friars from the insolence of the natives: it at present incloses a monastery of the Franciscans beforementioned; it is in form an hexagon, with salient angles; with light pieces about four and six pounders mounted, some brass, some iron. The wall about ten yards high, has no ditch, or out-work. The governor's nephew is the commandant, who shew'd it me; 'tis by no means in a condition to defend itself against any foreign enemy that have artillery: a company of foot do duty here, and at the governor's house, but a troop of horse, which are part here, and the

E rest

rest at Campeachy, escort the governor when he goes out. I was credibly inform'd, there was not five hundred troops in the whole province.

The dress of the Spaniards in this country is very light; the men wear a light linen waistcoat and trowsers, and drawers; the better sort, a fattimone (scarce ever wearing a coat) with a white linnen cap, and a broad brim straw hat. The women, of the lower class, a single petticoat only, no stays, or any other cloathing above the waist, except their shift; their bosoms no way concealed, but bare to

to the nipples of their breast ; indeed, when they go out on a visit, even those who keep their calash, have no more than a silk scarf loosely flung over their shoulders ; this is crimson fattin, generally embroidered : they are for the most part pretty ; some of them of very fair complexions ; they wear their hair braided behind, and tied in two different bows, with pink ribbons, and are very free and unrevered. I would be understood here, with respect to the provincials only ; the old Castilians (as they call themselves) they being such as hold offices under the crown, or those who come for

the sake of trade ; they dress as in Old Spain, and hold the other inhabitants in very little esteem.

The Jucatan Indians are a most willing, obliging, meek temper'd people ; very laborious ; of middling stature, and well featur'd : their hair strait and black, but cut short, except a lock on each side their temple, which they are constrained to wear as a badge of subjection to the Spanish monarchy. Their dress is a kind of short frock, reaching to the waist, and trowsers ; a straw hat, and sandals : but when they travel, they proceed quite naked, except a cloth to

to hide their privities. They are very active and dexterous in the woods with their muschalls, an instrument something between a knife and a cleaver, with which they clear away the bush in the woods, dress their meat, and use it as an instrument of offence on occasion.

The women are, in general, short and thick set, with agreeable countenances; their hair black, which they generally wear club'd behind ; and those near Merida, with a pink ribband : they go bare leg'd, with a short cotton petticoat, which they adorn about
the

the bottom, with flowers of various colours, in needlework : as also their frocks, in the same manner, round the bosoms. These are always made of cotton, of their own spinning and weaving : the frock reaches only to the upper part of the petticoat, but this they throw off when employ'd on any domestick busineſſ, going naked to the waist.

The police of each of these towns; is managed by the following officers, whose titles I am better acquainted with than their office : they are always of the best repute, and fair character ; elderly

elderly men of the town, and have great respect shewn them by the Indians: they stand in rank as I here name them, the Cazique, Teniente, Alcaldi, and Fiscal; who reside at what is called the king's house, and adjust all civil causes: they are distinguished by several badges; the Alcaldi wearing a square blue cloth embroidered at the corners, hung to his left shoulder. The Teniente, a wand, with a cross at the top of it. The Fiscal wears a key, and a kind of cat with three tails, being by office both the prifon-keeper, and executor of punishment. These badges of his offices

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he always wears to his waist, hung to a sash round his body. They have in each of these houses, a ferivan, or clerk, who minutes the arrival and departure of expresses going to or from Merida, or from any of the towns in the province.

Their towns are poor, mean huts, built with stakes of Palmetta, (which they chuse for their straitness) and thatched, with the leaves to the ground, resembling a large beehive. They have no upper room, no more than the provincial Spaniards, and like them, sleep all in their grass hammocks,

as

as they are called, though they are made of the thready fibres of the leaves from the aloe-tree, in the same manner as hemp is got from the stalk ; they just throw a cotton cloth over them ; and when travelling, if night overtakes them, they sleep in these hammocks, hung between two trees ; never neglecting however, to make a good wood fire close to their hammocks. Their diet is very simple, being no more than a maize cake, and a little pasoli to drink ; a liquor made of the meal of the maize, left in water till it ferments, and grows sour : this generally they sweeten with honey,

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of which they find great plenty
in the woods.

Their principal employment is
the cultivation of the plantations ;
they train their children to the
practice of the bow and arrow ;
and with which they kill their
game, not being permitted to use
fire arms.

F I N I S.



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